

It turns out that running the United States House of Representatives is harder than it looks.

Not once but twice in the past two days, the new Republican team in charge has fumbled on what should have been easy passage of bills that had overwhelming support.

The back-to-back embarrassments - on an extension of the Patriot Act and on a bill to compel the United Nations to return \$179 million to the U.S. Treasury - suggested the young and relatively inexperienced team has yet to find its groove. Or that it has yet to heed the most basic rule of legislating: Don't take a bill to the floor unless you know how many votes you have.

The new Republican majority includes 87 freshmen, many of them ready to prove their conservative tea party bona fides by standing up to the leadership.

Neither failure was fatal to the legislation in question, as both bills are almost certain to pass the next time the Republican leadership tries. And the early hiccups came before the House faces its first major test: votes next week to slice at least \$32 billion from the 2011 budget.

While they publicly pointed fingers at recalcitrant Democrats, GOP leaders privately blamed one another. Rank-and-file Republicans grumbled that their leaders would not have been surprised had they kept them informed about what issues were coming up, or bothered to find out how they planned to vote.

**"Nobody asked," Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.) said Wednesday, explaining what he told Republican leaders Tuesday evening before opposing an extension of provisions in the Patriot Act.**

The bill garnered a strong majority - with 277 in favor and 148 opposed - and would have passed easily had GOP leaders brought it to the floor under normal procedures. But they chose to do it under special fast-track rules, usually reserved for non-controversial measures, that require a two-thirds vote.

They made the same mistake Wednesday on the bill to require the refund from the United Nations. Republicans support that idea, saying the U.S. government overpaid. But the bill also includes funding for security improvements at U.N. headquarters.

No one notified Rep. Peter T. King (R-N.Y.), chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, until Tuesday afternoon, prompting him to contact New York City officials who opposed any cuts to security funding for such a high-value target.

"The fact is, this is a disaster waiting to happen," King said during the floor debate.

The bill fell more than 25 votes shy of two-thirds, as most Democrats joined King in opposing the measure.

Chagrined, Republicans expect to bring the extension of the Patriot Act, which fell seven votes short of the two-thirds hurdle, for another vote Thursday under normal rules and expect it to pass easily with a simple majority.

New majorities have struggled in the past. When Democrats took over the House four years ago, they fumbled over procedural motions offered by Republicans and saw some of their freshmen vote with the GOP. Then, in July 2007, Democratic leaders gavelled shut a vote and declared victory when it actually appeared Democrats had lost by two votes.

House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) shook off this week's stumbles as part of the learning curve.

"We've been in the majority four weeks," he told reporters Wednesday. "We're not going to be perfect every day."

The twin defeats this week served as the first blemishes on the records of the self-proclaimed "Young Guns," House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) and House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.). Cantor and McCarthy provided much of the ideological energy behind the November sweep by Republicans, including recruiting many of the freshmen.

Now, however, Cantor and McCarthy must also govern the often rambunctious House. Close allies who previously led the minority whip team, the two men have never held elected leadership posts while in the majority.

Cantor's primary duty is to schedule the floor debate, working in conjunction with McCarthy, who is charged with running a detailed operation of counting votes.

"We are ironing out a few kinks," Brad Dayspring, spokesman for Cantor, said in a statement. "The reality is that, had 36 Democrats not reversed their own position and opposed the Obama Administration to temporarily extend Patriot Act, it would have passed. Shame on us, lesson learned, but the extension will be passed."

King said the leaders did not understand the potential gravity of the U.N. security issue when they scheduled a vote requiring the two-thirds majority. On the Patriot Act, some Republicans, particularly the freshmen who had never voted on the issue, thought that leaders brought the extension to the floor without fully explaining it.

"I kept my promise to the people of the 17th District and voted no against a bill that was rushed to the floor with limited debate," said Rep. Robert T. Schilling (R-Ill.), one of eight newcomers to oppose the measure.